

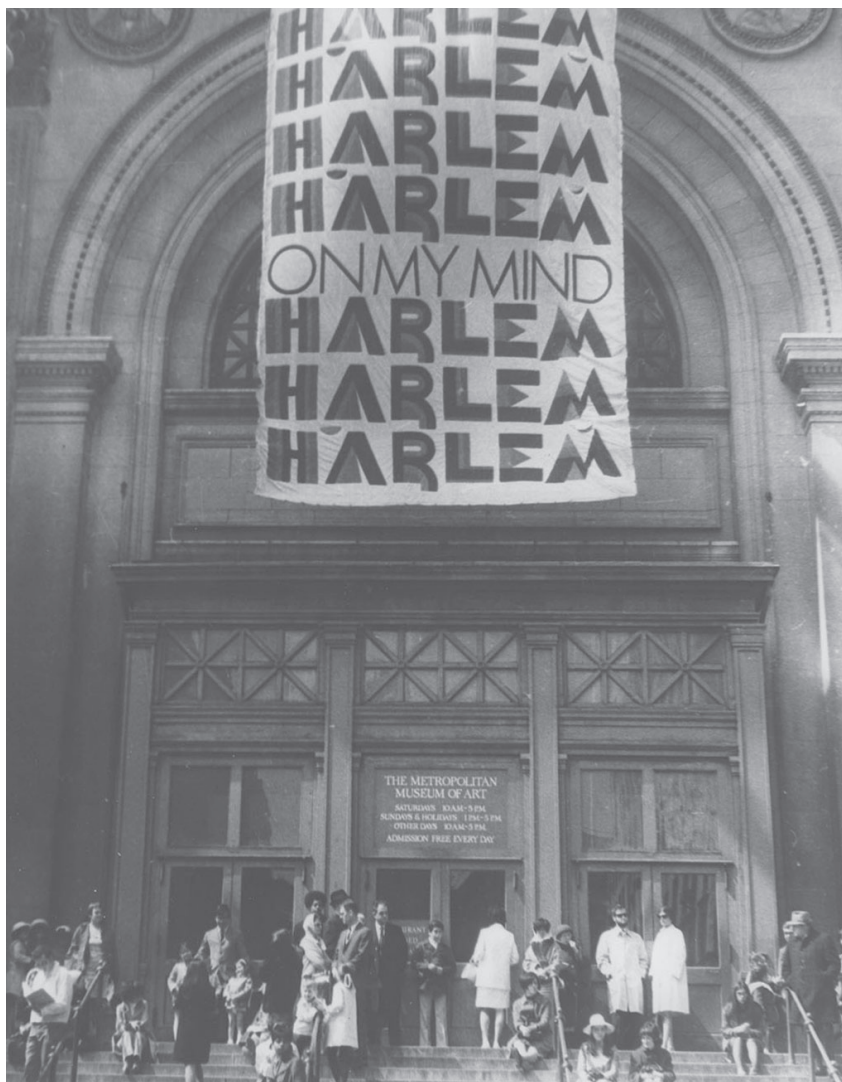
## **Black Artists and Activism: *Harlem on My Mind* (1969)**

**Bridget R. Cooks**

To me *Harlem on My Mind* is a discussion. It is a confrontation. It is education. It is a dialogue. And today we better have these things. Today there is a growing gap between people, and particularly between black people and white people. And this despite the efforts to do otherwise. There is little communication. *Harlem on My Mind* will change that.

—Thomas P. F. Hoving, Director  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art  
New York City, August 1968 <sup>1</sup>

In 1969, the Metropolitan Museum of Art mounted *Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900–1968*, an exhibition that sought to explore the cultural history of the predominantly Black community of Harlem, New York.<sup>2</sup> At the center of one of the most controversial exhibitions in U.S. history were the Met's decisions to reject Harlem residents from participating in the exhibition planning and to exclude artwork by Harlem's thriving artist community from its galleries. Near the end of the Civil Rights Movement and the beginning of the Black Power Movement, Black culture emerged in the Metropolitan not as creative producer but as ethnographic study.<sup>3</sup> The decisions to display African American people through oversized photo-murals and to dismiss their input and artwork as unworthy of being in the museum made *Harlem on My Mind* a site



**Figure 1:** *Metropolitan Museum of Art Façade* (1969). Lloyd Yearwood, photographer. All rights reserved, Lloyd Yearwood.

for racial politics and debates about artistic quality and art versus culture in the United States.

The conflicts between the Met and the Harlem art community engaged both political and aesthetic issues. For many Harlemites, the White mainstream art museum's refusal to engage Harlem's art community reeked of patronizing discriminatory racial politics. The Met's decision to represent Harlem without incorporating the Harlem community set off a fury of protest and charges of

racism. Similarly, the museum's decision to exclude Harlem artists was met by disbelief and sincere efforts to correct the omission during the planning stages of the exhibition. Harlem artists were further insulted by the inclusion only of photographs. At the time the art world at large or Harlem's art and photography communities did not accept photographs as a form of art. As a form of visual documentary, photography was an unacceptable representation of Harlem's rich artistic community in one of the world's greatest art museums.

In spite of the directors' intention to increase Black–White communication, what was most significant about *Harlem on My Mind* was not the exhibition itself, but the activism of the Black art communities in Harlem criticizing their omission. This community movement changed the discourse of Black art in mainstream American museum politics. In his succinct account of the significance of *Harlem on My Mind* for American museums, Steven C. Dubin discusses some of the shortcomings and criticisms of the exhibition concerning Black exclusion, charges of anti-semitism, and cultural conflict.<sup>4</sup> Missing from his critique, however, is the critical outcome: the increasingly powerful role of oppressed communities to organize their voices against blatant omissions, disrespectful treatment, and cultural misrepresentation by art museums in the United States.

*Harlem on My Mind* commanded attention not only because of the Metropolitan's international status as an institution of fine art, but also because the exhibition was the museum's first attempt at representing African Americans through exhibition.<sup>5</sup> The Met's position of privilege commanded attention making the impact of *Harlem on My Mind* wide reaching and influential. This essay explores the Metropolitan's impulse to become socially relevant, the issues at stake for the Harlem art community, and the significance of the exhibition on the discourse of Black art.

Miscommunications between *Harlem on My Mind* organizers and the Harlem art communities fueled Black activism to counter the exhibition's cultural assertion in two ways. First, Black artists and curators pressured mainstream art museums to make institutional change by including Black artists in their exhibitions, consulting members of Black arts communities regarding their representation, and hiring Black museum professionals. Second, Black artists and curators responded to the Metropolitan's disregard for Black artists by increasing their efforts to curate their own exhibitions. The significance of this activism moved beyond the geographic and temporal scope of the Met galleries and the 1960s New York art world. Indeed, because of the museum's mistakes, the exhibition invigorated a movement of Black artists and museum professionals that changed the culture of the American art scene. Most immediately, their contribution became part of the Black Arts Movement, in which Black artists, poets, actors, and writers took hold of the creative history of Black Americans, connected with it, expanded it, and confronted mainstream America. The multifaceted response by Black visual arts communities to the failure of *Harlem on My Mind* represented a public criticism of art museums' failure to recognize living cultures.

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Because of the Met's world renown for its remarkable collection of fine art, it seems odd that the museum would produce a socio-documentary exhibition about Harlem. The Met had established an identity as a cultural stronghold of artifacts and artistic knowledge. There were no practical, social, or professional expectations that the museum would take on an active role in the social politics of the day, particularly in 1969. Politically and racially the United States was reeling from the events of 1968, the watershed year that saw the North Vietnamese Tet Offensive which increased American opposition to the Vietnam war; the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. and subsequent riots in major American cities; the murder of seventeen-year-old Bobby Hutton of the Black Panther Party by Oakland City Police; the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy; the police riot against protestors at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago; and the raised Black Power fists of American track and field athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos during the medal awards ceremony of the Summer Olympic Games in Mexico City.

The struggle for power that developed between the Met directors and the Harlem art community over *Harlem on My Mind* had parallels in the struggle for public school decentralization and community control in the Ocean Hill–Brownsville area of Brooklyn. Between 1967 and 1971, the primarily Black and Puerto Rican Ocean Hill–Brownsville community battled the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and the New York Board of Education to control the selection of public school faculty, administrators, and curriculum. In 1968, the local governing board of Ocean Hill–Brownsville transferred nineteen white administrators and faculty, that were perceived as obstacles to community control of public schools, to the Board of Education headquarters to be reassigned.<sup>6</sup> Infuriated by the transfer, the nineteen returned to their jobs the next day where they were met by parents blocking the school entrances.

Parents in New York suburbs already enjoyed community control over the public schools without engaging in a struggle for power. In her analysis of the Ocean Hill–Brownsville conflict, Jane Anna Gordon explains,

Because there was not such a sharp discrepancy in the racial demographics of the populations of students and staff in suburban schools, particular and episodic issues might have caused disagreement and dissension, but there was not a prevailing and omnipresent sense on the part of school employees that the children in the schools were fundamentally “other people’s children.” White normativity, in other words, unified those who controlled and those who inhabited the schools.<sup>7</sup>

In the case of Ocean Hill–Brownsville, racial and ethnic differences politicized the issue of community control. What had proven to be an unremarkable shift of power *within* the predominantly white New York Board of Education and the suburban public schools became a confrontation in which racial and ethnic

discrimination and resentment forcefully exploded between the Board and the Ocean Hill–Brownsville community.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, the conflict regarding how to represent the people of Harlem spurred a struggle between those who controlled the Met and the Harlem art community. Both the Board of Education/Ocean Hill–Brownsville and the Met/Harlem community struggles brought decades of class and ethnic resentment to the forefront. Both situations involved Black–Jewish conflicts. The Ocean Hill–Brownsville struggle contributed to the politicized context of the *Harlem on My Mind* exhibition. When plans for the exhibition were announced, contention between Black and Jewish communities in the city was already at a peak.

Although it was peculiar that the Met undertook an exhibition about the people of Harlem during this time, four factors contributed to the decision to create *Harlem on My Mind*. First, as mentioned in the epigraph of this essay, the exhibition was conceived of as an intervention into the growing cultural gap between Blacks and Whites. Through the exhibition, the Met attempted to be an ambassador of racial harmony. However, what was initially considered a politically savvy exhibition managed to offend key political, racial, and ethnic factions. In itself, the goal of improving cross-cultural relationships through the arts was not uncommon in the middle of the twentieth century. As early as 1922, real estate entrepreneur William E. Harmon established the Harmon Foundation to “acquaint the public more generally in the creative accomplishments in fine arts by Negroes” and “to recognize and promote the overlooked achievements of African Americans, and respond to the increase of racial tension in America.”<sup>9</sup> In 1940, documentary filmmakers had been using their medium to increase support for the education of Black Americans, racial integration in the American south, and to promote White tolerance of Blacks.<sup>10</sup> In 1955, Edward Steichen, director of the Department of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), in curating the groundbreaking photographic exhibition *The Family of Man*, intended to promote peace and present the commonalities between racial, ethnic, and religious groups internationally. *Harlem on My Mind* followed in the path of these simplistic, if well intentioned projects that contributed to solving the “Negro problem.”

Second, during the late 1960s, New York’s social elite enjoyed the season of Radical Chic made famous by author Tom Wolfe. Planned as an opportunity to bridge class, racial, and ethnic divisions, these high society parties hosted activists and leaders of organizations such as the Black Panther Party and La Causa that were treated unjustly by the U.S. government. The events raised money for the guest groups and served to relieve the guilt of the blue-blood New Yorkers that hosted them. In the private apartments of the wealthy, socialites would meet the exotic peoples they had only seen on television. Their meetings provided the opportunity for hosts to show their peers that they were “hip” to the struggle of the politically disfranchised if not the FBI’s most wanted.<sup>11</sup>

The crucial irony of this arrangement was the hosts’ superficial understanding of the objectified group’s oppression on one hand and the sincere desire to

maintain an ostentatious lifestyle with their names in the press on the other. In order to sustain this delicate balance, the Radical Chic had to avoid the direct connection between the two hands that would show how the wealth of the few is directly connected to the poverty of the many. The phenomenon of Radical Chic created a highly orchestrated arrangement for the wealthy to protect their social status while being moved by (but not enough to actual change) the struggles of the underclass. Civil rights leader Bayard Rustin was one of many Black Americans critical of Radical Chic saying, “These people [the party hosts] are really saying ‘*You sic ’em, nigger Panthers. You bring about a revolution for us while we go on living our nice little jolly lives. You niggers do it. We’ll be right behind you—at a considerable distance.*’”<sup>12</sup> Dozens of these fundraising parties, which offered the wealthy an opportunity to live vicariously through the *other*, took place in New York just minutes away from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The museum’s plan to mount *Harlem on My Mind* followed this social trend by extending the tantalizingly transgressive interracial event from Park Avenue to its own galleries at the top of the art world. Although the Metropolitan is situated in Manhattan’s Upper East Side at Fifth Avenue and 82<sup>nd</sup> Street, less than two miles from the southern perimeter of Harlem, it is light years away from the socio-economic reality of Harlem.

Third, under the command of Allon Schoener, director of the Visual Arts Program of the New York State Council on the Arts and director of the Metropolitan Museum’s Exhibition Committee, and Thomas P. F. Hoving, recently hired director of the Metropolitan, the museum’s new leadership hoped to mix current cultural issues with the traditions of the prestigious institution. Before Hoving joined the Met, he served as the Parks Commissioner and Administrator of Recreation and Cultural Affairs for New York City in the liberal administration of Republican Mayor John V. Lindsay. In that capacity he earned a reputation for non-traditional programs by organizing “be-ins, love-ins, traffic-free bike ridings, Puerto Rican folk festivals, and happenings.”<sup>13</sup> Hoving had become known as someone who could combine elements of tradition with contemporary topics.

To underscore the importance of curating *Harlem on My Mind* and to reinforce his decision to take a risk by presenting it, Hoving referred to the Metropolitan’s Charter,

one of the stated missions of the museum is to relate art to practical life, and practical living to art. . . . We have this remarkable show because the city and the country need it. We put it on because this great cultural institution is indeed a crusading force attempting to enhance the quality of our life, and to support and buttress and confirm the deep and abiding importance of humanism.<sup>14</sup>

Though unrecognized by Hoving and Schoener, the need to go beyond the limits of humanism to understand the specific attributes of cultural struggle, val-





**Figure 2:** “1920–1929: An Urban Black Culture,” Exhibition Gallery Museum Views, Interior. Special Exhibitions: *Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900–1968*. Gallery Installation: Photographed March 25, 1969; The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



**Figure 3:** “1900–1919: From White to Black,” Exhibition Gallery Museum Views, Interior. Special Exhibitions: *Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900–1968*. Gallery Installation: Photographed March 25, 1969; The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



**Figure 4:** “1930–1939: Depression and Hard Times,” Exhibition Gallery Museum Views, Interior. Special Exhibitions: *Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900–1968*. Gallery Installation: Photographed March 25, 1969; The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.





**Figure 5:** “1900–1919: From White to Black Harlem,” Exhibition Gallery Museum Views, Interior. Special Exhibitions: *Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900–1968*. Gallery Installation: Photographed March 25, 1969; The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

ues, and politics was most important for the cross-cultural success of *Harlem on My Mind*. Schoener organized a popular humanistic project instead of engaging in a reflective examination and understanding of the diversity of the community that he chose to represent.

The exhibition consisted of thirteen galleries organized chronologically into thematic decade-long sections: 1900–1919: From White to Black Harlem; 1920–1929: An Urban Black Culture; 1930–1939: Depression and Hard Times; 1940–1949: War, Hope and Opportunity; 1950–1959: Frustration and Ambivalence; 1960–1968: Militancy and Identity.<sup>15</sup>

Text panels marking the decades and thematic titles within each section hung from the gallery ceilings. Various wall layout designs were used throughout the galleries to display more than 2,000 photographs.<sup>16</sup> Some walls held large-scale black and white photomurals eighteen feet in height and of varying widths. Unframed mounted photographs and reproductions of ephemera such as covers of the NAACP’s *The Crisis* magazine, and advertisements for musical and dance performances, were arranged in horizontal lines and regular and irregular grid patterns approximately six feet in height down to the floor molding (figure 2).

Some walls were used dramatically as dark screens for projected images of Harlemites and street scenes from slide projectors suspended from ceiling tracks. Four-sided columns displayed photographs of Harlem buildings, streets, and residents in both formal portraits and informal community scenes. Some columns, topped with large photo-text cubes, stood over ten feet high in selected galleries as if they were free standing sculpture (figures 3 and 4). Several of these towers highlighted notable Harlem figures such as elder resident Alice Payton “Mother” Brown and Billie Holiday in their respective decade galleries.

Speakers camouflaged in large cylinders, hung throughout the galleries, delivered Harlem street sounds and music to visitors (figures 2 and 5). Films and videos were interspersed through the galleries to provide further information, and a closed-circuit television showed the real-time activity at the intersection of Seventh Avenue and 125th Street in Harlem.<sup>17</sup> Photographs punctuated with text were suspended from the ceiling to create billboard-like visual timelines that marked important national events, such as the Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954 (figure 6). The exhibition was designed to provide a one-hour experience for each visitor.<sup>18</sup>

The *Harlem on My Mind* catalog contains only a small percentage of the photographs and ephemera facsimiles displayed in the exhibition. The catalog does not provide a sense of the physical presence or spatial dimensions of the exhibition.<sup>19</sup> The pictures and texts printed in their respective decade-long sections were represented on the gallery walls and photo-text cubes in *Harlem on My Mind*, but their reproduction on the catalog pages does not even hint at the production level of the exhibition. Instead of reprinting all of the photographs, ephemera, object labels, and interpretive texts peppered throughout the galleries, the catalog contains newspaper articles about Harlem from mainstream and Harlem community newspapers and some photographs.

Hoving fulfilled his promise to offer a multi-media extravaganza through *Harlem on My Mind*, but critics from the Black and White presses agreed that this triumph of form was delivered at the expense of content. Art critics were disappointed, calling *Harlem on My Mind* a sociology exhibit rather than the art exhibition that they had expected from the Met. Some art critics wrote that the exhibition did not belong in an art museum, and therefore they were unqualified to review it. In his review of the exhibition, *New York Times* art critic John Canaday explained that the exhibition, “presents a subject vastly complicated, easily subject to distortion, and just now so highly charged emotionally that to evaluate the show objectively is going to be impossible for most people.”<sup>20</sup> Exhibition reviewer Cathy Aldridge summarized her experience as a visitor for the *New York Amsterdam News*,

The subtle staging of the show created this boxed-in feeling—its stark white walls, its crisp black and white photographs most of which are life-sized. The few illustrious figures who were created as famous men and women in entertainment,

jazz, and a few other fields do little to soften the effect. Without softness to alleviate the stark black and whiteness of the show the exhibit remains a stark semblance of a white man's view of a black section of the city which was created out of color prejudice. . . . It is a shame that such an opportunity did not create something of which all of New York can be proud. True, the photographs portray truth, but there are other truths which are missing from this exhibit.<sup>21</sup>

New York Times art critic John Canaday wrote,

In its breadth and complexity the phenomenon of Harlem may be impossible of [sic] exposition in popular terms except as a picturesque surface or from an arbitrarily adopted point of view that will include this, exclude that, in order to develop a predetermined thesis. . . . I cannot see that an art critic has any business reviewing either [the book] or the exhibition unless he is also sure of himself as a sociologist, which lets me out.<sup>22</sup>

New York Times art critic Grace Glueck professed,

To this viewer, there is something terribly American about "Harlem." It panders to our penchant for instant history, packaged culture, the kind of photojournalistic "experience" that puts us at a distance from the experience itself. Instead of the full, rich, Harlem brew, it presents a freeze-dried Harlem that does not even hint at flavor.<sup>23</sup>

The exhibition's lack of artworks, combined with the simplistic presentation of Harlem provided a disservice to Harlemites, the art world, and exhibition visitors. Contemporary voices from the Black press agreed that the exhibit was lacking in its reflection of Harlem life. In her *New York Amsterdam News* article "Exhibit on Everybody's Mind," Cathy Aldridge wrote, "A white man's view of Harlem can be objective, but when that objectivity is narrow in scope and shallow in depth what else could result but an unintelligent display of his so-called objectivity."<sup>24</sup>

The last and perhaps most influential factor leading to *Harlem on My Mind* was Schoener's previous exhibition curated for The Jewish Museum in New York in 1967. The goal of *Portal to America: The Lower East Side, 1870–1925* was to design an exhibition dedicated to the first American neighborhood for millions of immigrants. Schoener was a trained art historian specializing in twentieth-century environmental criticism. He had not had the opportunity to study the history of Jewish Americans and found the chance to explore his own heritage appealing.<sup>25</sup> *Portal to America* was a successful exhibition in terms of its critical reception,

its local cultural relevance, and its appeal to New Yorkers. It was essentially a model for *Harlem on My Mind*. Both exhibitions addressed geographic spaces in New York City and primarily used photomurals of documentary images for the gallery walls. The catalogs for the two exhibitions share the same art director, Harris Lewine, and designer, Herb Lubalin, and appear to be nearly identical in format and concept.<sup>26</sup> The differences between the two exhibitions however, caused the fundamental tensions that created contention. *Harlem on My Mind* explored sixty-eight years of history, bringing the discussion up to the year of the exhibition. *Portal to America* covered fifty-five years in the Lower East Side, ending in 1925. This difference in time periods posed a challenge, not only because *Harlem on My Mind* was larger and chronologically longer than *Portal to America*, but also because *Portal to America* relegated the discussion of the Jewish community safely to the past while *Harlem on My Mind* included an exploration of the contemporary community. *Harlem on My Mind*'s position as the Met's first exhibition about the racial *other* presented an additional challenge, particularly during a volatile period of racial conflict between Black and Jewish communities.

The exclusion of art was a critical difference between *Portal to America* and *Harlem on My Mind*. Both exhibitions were multimedia presentations of photographs, sounds, and slide projections, but *Portal to America* included forty-eight lithographs, paintings, drawings, and one sculpture by artists either from the Lower East Side or depicting notable neighborhood scenes and figures. Although initial plans conceived *Harlem on My Mind* as "a multimedia exhibition on the history of Harlem, since 1900, using photographs, paintings, prints, drawings, films, television recordings of sounds and voices, music and memorabilia," later press coverage of the upcoming exhibition reflected the curatorial decision to omit paintings and prints.<sup>27</sup> These texts described the exhibition as a "multi-media exhibit," and a "sociohistorical communications environment" "not to be confused with an art show."<sup>28</sup>

To supplement the *Portal to America* exhibition catalog, The Jewish Museum published a separate anthology of fifteen essays about the Lower East Side by writers who lived there or who testified to the profound effect that the neighborhood had on their lives and on the larger culture outside of the neighborhood's geographic boundaries.<sup>29</sup> Included in this anthology were biographies of each artist whose work was in *Portal to America* and selected reproductions of artworks in the exhibition. There was no additional publication for *Harlem on My Mind* that could offer supplemental testimony about life in Harlem or commentary about its artwork or artists. Through the inclusion of artwork and the companion publication that gave writers the opportunity to pay tribute to and express the relevance of the Lower East Side, the *Portal to America* exhibition and catalog provided a respectful and inclusive examination. Likewise, the Harlem artists believed that their artwork should have been privileged in an art museum exhibition about their community.

Harlem-based painter, author, and mentor Romare Bearden made an “urgent request” to Hoving to meet about the accuracy of the exhibition regarding “serious questions relating both to the organization and the plans for presenting the artistic material in this important exhibit” by “a number of artists, photographers, and other interested persons.”<sup>30</sup> In a letter to Schoener dated June 6, 1968, Bearden expressed concern about the lack of art in the exhibition saying, “importantly, I know the artists are not going to tolerate color transparencies of their work in an Art Museum. As I see it, the sort of show you are putting together should be in the Museum of the City of New York, The New-York Historical Society, or some similar place.”<sup>31</sup> In a symposium sponsored by the Met titled “The Black Artist in America,” artist William T. Williams stated his thoughts about the exclusion of artwork from *Harlem on My Mind*,

One of the things that’s happening is that every show that concerns Black artists is really a sociological show. The *Harlem on My Mind* show is a pointing example of total rejection on the part of the establishment, of saying “Well, you’re really not doing art,” or of not dealing with the artists that may exist or do exist in Harlem. These shows deal with the sociological aspects of a community, a historical thing.<sup>32</sup>

The exclusion of artwork and an anthologized critical commentary sent a message from the Met that Harlem was a less serious subject for examination than the Lower East Side.

Although Schoener included art in the Lower East Side exhibition, he stated that paintings would have “detracted from the kind of experience I wanted to create, and [I] decided to use only photographs in the Harlem exhibition.”<sup>33</sup> Paintings would have testified to the artistic abilities of Black people and included their point of view. Uninterested in this kind of sophisticated contribution, Schoener chose instead to construct an atmosphere that would re-create the way that he experienced Harlem from his position of privilege. The exclusion of art was Schoener’s strategy to re-create the experience of Harlem on his mind. In fact, the difference between Schoener’s concept of Harlem and the way the people of Harlem wanted to be represented formed the great tension over *Harlem on My Mind*. This war over cultural representation illuminated what was at stake for the Harlem community and for a larger community of Black Americans that were invested in how their story would be represented, packaged, and sold.

In an effort to appear inclusive, Schoener spent the summer of 1967 selecting members of a special staff to research exhibition content and plan the overall design of the galleries using the latest audio visual technology. With the help of Jean Blackwell Hutson, curator of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library in Harlem, Schoener assembled a three-person-research-advisory committee consisting of Hutson, Regina Andrews, a board member of the National Urban League, and John Henrik Clarke, a political

and cultural activist in Harlem. These three were residents of Harlem and their jobs involved the history and politics of their community.

In addition, Schoener organized a five-member research staff for the exhibition through the New York State Council on the Arts including Robert Malone, exhibition designer, Reginald McGhee, director of photographic research, Donald Harper, associate researcher and media director, A'lelia Nelson, community research coordinator, and Martin S. Moskof, exhibition graphic designer. This staff worked in a satellite office housed in the Schomburg Center. Although McGhee, Harper, and Nelson were Black, none of the members of the research staff were from Harlem.<sup>34</sup> Because the research staff were not residents, their selection drew criticism from the research-advisory committee and Harlem artists, that were increasingly interested in the exhibition planning.

Schoener also made a connection with the Harlem Cultural Council comprised of several hundred members. Established in 1964 and led by executive director Edward K. Taylor Jr., the Harlem Cultural Council was a prominent Black advocacy group that sponsored a major survey of African-American art in 1966.<sup>35</sup> Schoener made Taylor a member of the executive board of the Community Advisory Committee. Although the members of Schoener's Harlem committees took their positions seriously, they were not allowed to have a say in the planning of the exhibition.<sup>36</sup>

Frustrated by their lack of influence the research advisory committee and the Harlem Cultural Council withdrew their support from the exhibition on November 22, 1968. The Harlem Cultural Council stated that there was a "breakdown in communication" between the council and the museum. Taylor openly complained, "The Met came to us with elaborate promises of community involvement in the show. But they haven't really begun to consult us. We're expected simply to be rubber stamps and window dressing."<sup>37</sup> In an August 28, 1968, letter to Romare Bearden, John Henrik Clarke reported the poor treatment he was receiving from the exhibition organizers,

Right now I don't know where the project, "Harlem on My Mind" is going and I am not encouraged by some of the late developments relative to it. The basis of the trouble with this project is that it never belonged to us and while alot of people listened to our suggestions about the project. Very few of these suggestions were ever put into effect.<sup>38</sup>

Upset by the exhibition planning, Clarke said that the research-advisory committee's suggestions that *Harlem on My Mind* "be more culturally oriented" had been bypassed for a stress on "entertainment." He stated, "It could be a magnificent show, but the emphasis is more on show biz techniques than on content. It's what I call cutesie-pie-ism."<sup>39</sup> Hoving protested the withdrawal of Harlem support, saying, "Our staff of black and white specialists has worked closely with various organizations in Harlem. This show has incomparable potential.



Too much is at stake for any particular group, no matter how dedicated it is, not to be involved."<sup>40</sup> Despite his immediate defensiveness, Schoener later admitted that his approach to winning the approval of Harlem through his administrative committees was superficial and that he never intended to seriously consider what contributions they could make.<sup>41</sup>

Further controversy around the exhibition stemmed from anti-Semitic remarks published in the exhibition catalog. Hoving sought to include comment on the cultural content of *Harlem on My Mind* and the current Black and Jewish tensions in New York by printing a high school student term paper in the catalog written by Candice Van Ellison, a Harlem resident and recent graduate of Theodore Roosevelt High School in the Bronx, who had served as an intern at the New York Council on the Arts through its "Ghetto Arts Corps" program. She came to the attention of McGhee, who gave her high school term paper to Schoener. Inspired by her insight, Schoener asked Van Ellison to omit the footnotes and quotations so that the essay would be less academic and be written in her own words.<sup>42</sup> Schoener wanted the introduction to serve as commentary from "an ordinary citizen, a true representative of the people."<sup>43</sup>

In the essay, Van Ellison discussed the relationship between Black, Irish, Jewish, and Puerto Rican communities in New York. She states in one of her now infamous passages:

It is true that only a small portion of Harlem's population is Irish, yet a strong Irish influence is exerted on Harlem through the city's police force. As early as 1900, when the city's main poverty concentration was in the Tenderloin, a bloody three-day riot was sparked when an Afro-American named Arthur Harris knifed and killed an Irish policeman who was manhandling his girl. This incident was just the spark needed to set off the already strained Irish-Afro-American relations. The numerous tales of police brutality in the riot ranged from policemen merely looking the other way while mobs attacked Blacks, to the arresting of Negroes and beating them senseless inside the precinct. . . . Anti-Jewish feeling is a natural result of the black Northern migration. Afro-Americans in Northeastern industrial cities are constantly coming in contact with Jews. Pouring into lower-income areas in the city, the Afro-American pushes out the Jew. Behind every hurdle that the Afro-American has yet to jump stands the Jew who has already cleared it. Jewish shopkeepers are the only remaining "survivors" in the expanding Black ghettos. This is especially true in Harlem, where almost all of the high-priced delicatessens or other small food stores are run by Jews. . . . The lack of competition in this area allows the already badly exploited Black to be further exploited by Jews. One other important factor worth noting is

that, psychologically, Blacks may find anti-Jewish sentiments place them for once, within a majority. Thus, our contempt for the Jew makes us feel more completely American in sharing a national prejudice.<sup>44</sup>

In the week before the exhibition opened, word spread quickly about the content of Van Ellison's essay, and there was an immediate uproar. On January 17, 1969, Mayor Lindsay called the catalog racist and requested that it no longer be sold.<sup>45</sup> On January 18, Dore Schary, the president of the Anti-Defamation League, said the catalog was "something akin to the worst hatred ever spewed out by the Nazis."<sup>46</sup> The Jewish Defense League and the American Jewish Congress followed in the condemnation of the book. Schoener defended the catalog and denied that the introduction was racist. Though the essay embarrassed him, Hoving also stood by Van Ellison, saying, "It is her personal observation on life in her block. It is not inflammatory. It is the truth. If the truth hurts, so be it."<sup>47</sup>

Responding to public criticism, Hoving ordered that an insert be placed in the introduction of all the copies of the exhibition catalog disclaiming the racist content of Van Ellison's essay. The disclaimer was to be written by Van Ellison to deny any racist intent, but in a 1993 interview, Schoener disclosed that the disclaimer was written through a series of telephone conversations between Van Ellison and Bernard Botein, chairman of the Special Committee on Revival and Religious Prejudice of New York.<sup>48</sup> Hoving maintains that Van Ellison wrote the insert which read,

In regards to the controversy concerning the section in my introduction dealing with intergroup relations, I would like to state that the facts were organized according to the socio-economic realities of Harlem at the time, and that any racist overtones which were inferred from the passages quoted out of context are regrettable.<sup>49</sup>

Unconvinced that she had done anything wrong, Van Ellison's statement was hardly an apology. Random House inserted its own apology for Van Ellison's essay in copies of the hard cover edition of the catalog.

The New York City Council threatened to withhold city funds to the Met unless it stopped selling the catalog. On February 7, the museum stopped catalog sales, but the catalog was still available in retail bookstores.<sup>50</sup> The same day, plans were made to discuss the controversies over the catalog and the exclusion of the Harlem community in the planning of the exhibition. Students at Columbia University announced a roundtable discussion about *Harlem on My Mind* with a group of speakers that included Jean Hutson from the Research-Advisory Committee; Henri Ghent, Harlem artist and Community Division Director of the Brooklyn Museum; photographer Roy DeCarava; Edwin Henry, Director of the

Tutorial Program at the Academy for Black and Latin Education; and Richard E. Whittemore, chairman of the Social Studies Department at Teachers College.<sup>51</sup>

Van Ellison was the only Harlem resident who was asked to contribute to the catalog. There was no other perspective from a historian, art historian, sociologist, or other scholar from Harlem that might have made a relevant contribution. The other texts in the catalog were the preface by Hoving and the foreword by Schoener.<sup>52</sup> The uproar over the catalog comments were discussed in the mainstream media through letters to the editor of the *New York Times* and WBAI New York City radio programs.<sup>53</sup> Certainly a more thoughtfully considered choice of catalog texts, perhaps following the *Portal to America* model, would have provided more support for the goal of bridging the racial gap through *Harlem on My Mind*.

Harlem artists maintained that the inclusion of the artwork could have provided museum visitors a richer and more accurate experience of Harlem.<sup>54</sup> Instead of stating that he intentionally excluded artwork from the exhibition, Schoener considered his own vision of Harlem as a work of art. He explained, "For me, people create art; therefore, it was legitimate to create an exhibition in an art museum which dealt with people."<sup>55</sup> Affirming his earlier statement that the inclusion of artwork would have detracted from the experience he wanted to create, Schoener takes his place as the author who speaks the exhibition's title. It is Harlem on Schoener's mind that was displayed in the galleries. Though cultural context is an important element in representing art in an art museum, in this equation the art is excluded and the exhibition of people becomes the work of art. The ethnographic turn toward African American culture in the art museum comes into focus through this exhibition. Similarly, in the exhibition press release Hoving called the neighborhood of Harlem a work of art by making an analogy between *Harlem on My Mind* and other exhibitions that the museum would mount.

There is no difference between this show and one of Rembrandt or Degas. Through their works, these artists reveal their individual worlds to us. The Harlem community becomes the artist in this case, the canvas the total environment in which Harlem's history was formed.<sup>56</sup>

As if they were unable to represent themselves, Harlem residents were interpreted through the Met and packaged as a cultural object. By considering all people of Harlem as artists, and the geographic space of Harlem as an artwork, the exhibition prohibited any sense of diversity within the Harlem community. In this way, the question of artistic production from Harlem was precluded, overdetermined by the Met as place.

In his book *The Predicament of Culture*, James Clifford addresses the divide between art and culture in the American art museum. Clifford discusses the art-culture relationship as a system in which art is defined as original and singular;

culture is defined as traditional and collective. Schoener perceived Harlem as a cultural collective. This definition conflicted with the possibility of an art world as defined by Eurocentric standards. To recognize art made by Black people would have interfered with Schoener's collective view by acknowledging living peoples and individual artists with original visions and expressions.<sup>57</sup> In short, the Harlem individual as artist would have disturbed the symbolic value of Blackness needed to reinscribe the Met's Whiteness. This investment in Whiteness defined the museum's identity as privileged, racially pure, and therefore entitled to define what art could and could not be along aesthetic and cultural lines. Eliminating art from the Harlem community confirmed a hierarchy of cultural production in the art world.

By omitting the art of Black Americans the Met defined their production as non-art. Racial difference was constructed in the galleries as ethnography and the people of Harlem as a collective cultural specimen. The chosen representations of Harlem presented the community as cultural capital, an objectified place but not a living culture in itself.

In 1968, two well-established and respected Black artists, Romare Bearden and Norman Lewis met with Schoener to express their dissatisfaction with the multimedia format of the exhibition, particularly with the concept of using photographs as the primary means of representation. Bearden and Lewis were founding members of the artist group Spiral, formed in 1963 to discuss the potential of Black artists to engage with issues of racial equality and struggle in the 1960s through their work.<sup>58</sup> The exclusion of art from *Harlem on My Mind* was a concern for members of Spiral as an issue of racial inequality and lack of self-representation in the art world. Bearden and Lewis argued that if the Met wanted to open its doors to Harlem, Black artists should be included.<sup>59</sup> Dismissing their position, Schoener replied that he was creating a documentary exhibition without original works of art.<sup>60</sup> That same year, Bearden wrote a letter to Schoener that definitively stated his position on the state of the exhibition planning, "As I have told you there are several things that the community is just not going to accept, and rather than completely antagonize people, it might actually be best to phase the show out, or else start immediately to work in the interests of the kind of show the community as a whole would want."<sup>61</sup> To no avail, the artists, Schoener, and his staff met several times to find a common ground for Black representation in *Harlem on My Mind*. At the end of November 1969, Bearden, Hutson and Harlem-based artist Benny Andrews, organized a demonstration against the exhibition. Unfazed by their protests, Schoener continued his project of cultural definition through display. Equally determined, the Harlem artist community continued their struggle for representation at the Met. After months of discussions with the museum's administrators, Andrews formed the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC) in his studio on January 9, 1969, specifically for the purpose of protesting *Harlem on My Mind*.<sup>62</sup> Andrews described in his journal the first BECC demonstration against the exhibition on January 12, 1969.



**Figure 6:** “1950–1959: Frustration and Ambivalence,” Exhibition Gallery Museum Views, Interior. Special Exhibitions: *Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900–1968*. Gallery Installation: Photographed March 25, 1969; The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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At 1:00 p.m. we started our demonstration at the Metropolitan against the “Harlem on My Mind” show. The police were waiting for us with barricades and very stern looks. A line of the Museum’s staff were right inside the Museum with their noses pressed against the glass doors peering out at us. We formed a long oval line and started to walk slowly around and around the police barricades with our placards denouncing the exhibition. The passing pedestrians and street traffic practically came to a halt when they spotted this small slow line of Black people in front of this massive, angry, forbidding, endless façade of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.<sup>63</sup>

Some of the interracial group had attended the meeting at Andrews’s studio, some joined after hearing about the meeting, and others joined spontaneously off the street.<sup>64</sup> Members of the BECC wore sandwich boards and carried picket signs that read, “Tricky Tom at it Again?” “That’s White of Hoving!” “Harlem on whose mind?” “Whose image of whom?” “On the Auction Block Again—Sold



**Figure 7:** “1960–1968: Militancy and Identity,” Exhibition Gallery in *Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900–1968*. Lloyd Yearwood, photographer. All rights reserved, Lloyd Yearwood. Yearwood photographs on display (c. 1959–1960). Clockwise from left to right: *Malcolm X in Harlem*, *Muslim Women I*, *Muslim Women II*, and *Muslim Brothers*.

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Out by Massa Hoving,” and “Visit the Metropolitan Museum of Photography.”<sup>65</sup> The BECC distributed leaflets in front of the museum, some with the headings, “Soul’s Been Sold Again!!!” and “Harlem on Whose Mind?”

The BECC’s questions displayed in protest demanded answers. The BECC agreed with Schoener, that it was his vision of Harlem that was on view in the Met’s galleries. However, as one of the museum’s directors and spokespersons for the exhibition, Hoving was the target of criticism as well. The exhibition displayed Harlem on the museum directors’ minds not on the mind of the Harlem art community. The BECC wanted to articulate the significant difference they saw between the museum’s representations of Harlem and their own rejected efforts to include their perspectives through self-representation.

The problems that aroused the protest of the Harlem art community were both political and aesthetic. The BECC called Hoving out as “White” and “Massa” emphasizing the contemporary unequal power relationships between Blacks and Whites that echo those of slavery. Similarly, the reference to selling soul hearkens back to the auction block in which White planters bought Black labor for White economic gain. The references are clear and direct: the BECC criticized their



treatment by the museum as a continuation of a racist patriarchal hegemonic system of Black control. The organization's protest material addressed its issue of the aesthetic conflict within the exhibition by highlighting the difference between photography and art. The BECC condemned the museum for working outside of the realm of its own self-defined formal boundaries by referring to the Met as a museum of photography rather than a museum of art. Again, this separation of photography from art was in keeping with a formal split of the era that did not consider photography as art.

The flyers also included a critique:

One would certainly imagine that an art museum would be interested in the world of Harlem's painters and sculptors. Instead, we are offered an audio-visual display comparable to those installed in hotel lobbies during conventions. If art represents the very soul of a people, then this rejection of the Black painter and sculptor is the most insidious segregation of all.<sup>66</sup>

The BECC charged the Met with presenting a "more squalid, seamy side of life in Harlem" and accused the museum of giving up art for social science. The BECC demanded a change in the structure of the museum. They wanted Black people to be a part of the daily business of the Met as staff members in hopes that integration within the museum would solve the problem of exclusion of Black artists from the museum.<sup>67</sup> The coalition presented a list of demands including the "appointment of Black people on a curatorial level and in all other policy-making areas of the museum." They also challenged the museum to "seek a more viable relationship with the Total Black Community." The leaflets called for a boycott of the exhibition and extended an open invitation for anyone to join the demonstration.<sup>68</sup>

On January 18, Hoving announced that the museum was developing plans for an exhibition of contemporary Black art in February. He expected a second exhibition of contemporary Black painting and art would follow shortly after the first.<sup>69</sup> This statement was powerful enough to stop the BECC from demonstrating. Schoener began plans for an exhibition of works by Black artists soon after meeting with Bearden and Lewis in 1968. The initial plan was for it to serve as a supplement to *Harlem on My Mind* and run concurrently with it. The Met selected James Sneed, director of the Harlem Art Gallery, to organize the exhibition, but planning ended because the Harlem artists and the Met could not agree on Sneed's exhibition proposal. Schoener explained, "The show never took place. This failure demonstrated the Metropolitan's lack of commitment to that request. The exhibition's cancellation left in its wake a sense of distrust on the part of the artists in Harlem who should have been our logical allies."<sup>70</sup> Expectations of collaboration were at the heart of the Harlem artists' protest. Painter Richard Mayhew, a member of Spiral and one of the artists who had protested

*Harlem on My Mind*, continues today to express his dissatisfaction with the way the exhibition organizers handled the artists,

The BECC was more active than Spiral in terms of actually picketing and challenging the museum at the time. Spiral, Bearden and Charles Alston, wanted to do it more in a letter form, and in some other ways, making contact with the museum directly and having meetings with them. Many of the meetings never happened. The picketing came about as more of a radical group. Benny Andrews and myself and other people, art historians were involved in that group. So we picketed and we challenged to have meetings with them and they refused to have that. The people at the museum never encouraged meetings or encouraged us to do this. It was always a sense of denial and omission. No direct contact.<sup>71</sup>

Despite protests against the Met, thousands of people went to see *Harlem on My Mind*. Ten thousand visited the exhibition on opening day, double the number of visitors on past opening days. An estimated 1,500 of those visitors were Black, six to seven times the average daily number of Black visitors to the museum, attesting to the desire for Blacks to see themselves in American institutions and to support institutions that recognize them even if *Harlem on My Mind* dealt superficially with Harlem and Black America.<sup>72</sup> For example, the gallery space dedicated to 1950–1959 displayed representations of Malcolm X on one side and Martin Luther King Jr. on the other in a dichotomous relationship.<sup>73</sup> Historian Eugene D. Genovese pointedly addressed this issue in his exhibition review,

The exhibit immediately involved political decisions: Should you emphasize the early or the late Malcolm? Malcolm the uncompromising Black Nationalist or Malcolm the man who ended his life edging toward a new position? The exhibit settles these questions in a manner that will not be to everyone's taste, but the real problem lies elsewhere: Who is making the decision to interpret Malcolm?<sup>74</sup>

Just four years after his death, the question of how to represent Malcolm X as a part of Harlem needed careful consideration, especially by Schoener and Hoving, who had no previous experience with those kinds of cultural politics in museums.<sup>75</sup>

Most of the selected photographs of Malcolm X and Black Muslims were taken by Harlem photographer Lloyd Yearwood, who has made his name as a photographer of Black spiritual communities with a specific focus on the activities of Black Muslims.<sup>76</sup> In 1968 Yearwood responded to a newspaper ad placed

by the Met that called for work by Harlem photographers.<sup>77</sup> He recalls his visit to the museum to show his photographs,

They had the show laid out on boards. There was nothing on the 1960s. Nothing on Malcolm X. They rearranged the whole board to make room for my photographs. I brought 277 prints and forty-six contact sheets. The Met kept fifty-seven prints and all contact sheets.<sup>78</sup>

The Met selected several of Yearwood's photographs of Black Muslim activities including images of Malcolm X for the 1950s and 1960s sections of the exhibition (figures 6–7). The contrast between King and Malcolm X in the galleries was not inherent in Yearwood's photographs but contrived by Schoener. Representing Malcolm X and King as binary ideologies was an easy way for the museum to avoid examining the complexities of the lives of both men and their contributions to politics, philosophy, and strategies for survival on an international and local level. A closer look at Yearwood's photographs should have suggested representing the Civil Rights Movement in Harlem beyond the misperception of an oppositional relationship between the two leaders.

It is probable that Schoener and his staff chose documentary photographs as the primary medium because they believed that it would make the exhibition appear to be objective. In the 1960s, the status of photography as art was acceptable in some art circles, but not in an established receptacle of great "masterpieces" of European painting, sculpture, and decorative arts. Ironically, some of the Black photographers whose work was included in the exhibition are now considered exceptional artists. Most notable are two giants in American photography, Gordon Parks and James VanDerZee. Although in 1969 their images were not considered art by the standards of the Metropolitan or the Black artists who protested the exhibition, they were highly esteemed by their peers as outstanding photographers.<sup>79</sup> In the cultural moment, the use of photographs in the exhibition, and the combination of photography and newspaper articles in the catalog were thought to support the museum's position as an apolitical institution. Regardless of its rejection of photography as art, the Met was implicated in the "objective" perspectives it chose for the exhibition. Yearwood is proud of his inclusion in *Harlem on My Mind* and regards the experience of seeing his work and name on the walls of the Met galleries as a highlight of his professional career.

Similarly, for James VanDerZee *Harlem on My Mind* was the pivotal event of his career. While looking for photographs of Harlem life in December 1967, McGhee happened upon VanDerZee's photography studio window. When he entered, he found the wealth of photographs that VanDerZee had created since the 1910s. In an interview, VanDerZee revealed that had he known that *Harlem on My Mind* was not "just another advertising stint," he would have given "a much better selection" of photographs to the exhibition.<sup>80</sup> The exposure that VanDerZee received from the exhibition led to a number of awards, honorary

doctorates, one-man exhibitions, and publications. As a result of his “discovery” of VanDerZee’s work and the subsequent display of his work in *Harlem on My Mind*, McGhee co-founded the James VanDerZee Institute in 1969 and in 1970 the Metropolitan acquired 66 of VanDerZee’s photographs as a gift from the Institute.<sup>81</sup> The Institute was housed in the Met for a brief time before merging with the Studio Museum of Harlem in 1978.

The opportunity to see Black faces on the gallery walls of the Metropolitan made an incredible impression on many Black visitors. A young generation of Black visitors, initially unaware of the controversy surrounding the exhibition, was greatly influenced by the *Harlem on My Mind* experience. Deborah Willis who went on to become the nation’s premiere photo-historian of African American images in the United States, was one of these young visitors who has mentioned the exhibition as an influential moment in her life.<sup>82</sup>

Unlike Yearwood and VanDerZee, photographer Roy DeCarava, who was included in *The Family of Man* exhibition and had published his own photographs about Harlem with Langston Hughes in *The Sweet Flypaper of Life* (1955), refused the Metropolitan’s invitation to be included in *Harlem on My Mind*. DeCarava opposed the presumption of Schoener and Hoving to stake a claim to Harlem. DeCarava declined participation in the exhibition, explaining,

It is evident from the physical makeup of the show that Schoener and company have no respect for or understanding of photography, or, for that matter, any of the other media that they employed. I would say also that they have no great love or understanding for Harlem, black people, or history.<sup>83</sup>

In *The Family of Man*, DeCarava was exhibited as equal to established photographers such as Ansel Adams, Henri Cartier-Bresson, and Robert Frank. He was also treated with respect at MoMA, having been eagerly befriended by Steichen in 1947 and quickly added to MoMA’s permanent collection in 1950.<sup>84</sup> In *The Family of Man*, the work of Black artists such as DeCarava and Gordon Parks comprised part of an international collection of images that sought, though problematically, to find the commonality between peoples, the artists conscripted to a nationalistic project as representatives of America.<sup>85</sup> DeCarava found this role more respectful than allowing his work to be used as illustrations for Schoener’s vision of Harlem. Schoener’s dismissive manner of working with the Harlem community further influenced DeCarava to decline participation in the exhibition.

The presentation of images by photographers who were mostly outsiders to the Harlem community raised old issues of scholarly representation through patronizing anthropological study. This was substantiated by Hoving’s preface to the exhibition catalog which established the idea of Harlem as a dangerous place where Whites would go seeking adventure.

My mother went to Harlem from time to time. To the clubs, carrying the delightful sense of slumming and far-off danger, a titillation of the perilous possibility that never came to pass. . . . Negroes, as human beings, did not exist in any real sense when I was eight, nine, ten, eleven. And they didn't really exist as far as my parents were concerned.<sup>86</sup>

Although Hoving wrote about the differences between Black and White people in the past tense, Hoving's preface clearly enunciated an attitude about Harlem and Black Americans that still existed. His mother's slumming served as Hoving's introduction to Harlem and certainly influenced his understanding of the community. The Met's approach to Harlem's cultural offerings, like thrill-seekers slumming during the Harlem Renaissance allowed White people to keep a privileged distance as outsiders looking in.

In his preface to the catalog, Hoving elaborates on his personal relationship to Harlem by writing about what Harlem meant to him as a child.

Times change, bodies change, minds change. When I grew up in New York and when I was a boy of eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, there was a Harlem. And Harlem was with me and my family—a wonderful maid of sunny disposition and a thin, sour chauffeur who drove me to school in moody silence.

To me and my family, living on 84th and Park Avenue, Harlem was a light-year away, uptown. And that was good. For behind the vague misty thoughts concerning *other people* that came through members of my family down to me, Negroes—colored people—constituted an unspoken menace, the tribe that must not be allowed to come down the Avenue.<sup>87</sup>

Later in the preface, Hoving refers to the maid again as he wondered why his chauffeur was "sour." Hoving asked, "Why can't he be like Bessie the maid?" To make matters worse, it turns out that Hoving created Bessie for the preface. He states in his memoir that he thought about omitting the fiction but Schoener encouraged him to leave the essay the way it was, "saying that he liked the confessional tone and especially the part about the maid and the family chauffeur."<sup>88</sup> The fictional Bessie served to complete the picture of Hoving's privileged upbringing by having a mammy at his service. His racial- and class-based fantasy expressed Hoving's ideal relationship to Harlem which might have influenced his decision not to participate in meaningful communication with real Black Harlemites.<sup>89</sup>

Still, in the face of an enormous challenge, Harlem's visual arts community refused to be ignored. Members of Spiral, the BECC, the Harlem Cultural Council, and the artists' group Weusi, contested the omission of Black artists in different and sometimes overlapping ways.<sup>90</sup> Although protesting en masse, the BECC, Spiral, and Weusi picketed the exhibition as separate groups representing

multi-generational attacks from different factions of the Harlem art community.<sup>91</sup> The Harlem Cultural Council protested by withdrawing their support of the exhibition. Members from all three artists' groups worked with the Research Committee of African American Art to plan a supplementary exhibit to *Harlem on My Mind* at the Met which was not realized.<sup>92</sup> As an established artist and co-founder of Spiral, Bearden sought to talk with Hoving and offered members of Spiral as consultants for *Harlem on My Mind*.<sup>93</sup> Members of Spiral and the BECC protested by developing strategic plans for formal meetings with museum administrators, along with public demonstrations to insure that they would be heard and seen. Benny Andrews recalls an incident at the preview reception for the exhibition during which he sought to discuss with Hoving "how this whole idea of an exhibition pertaining to the black mean [sic] seems to have already gotten off on the wrong foot."<sup>94</sup> He was told by a staff member that he would be contacted to set up an opportunity to speak, but he never was. After the demonstrations against *Harlem on My Mind*, the BECC formed an executive board of artists and a three-person committee headed by Benny Andrews, Henri Ghent, and John Sadler. Their goals included serving as "a watchdog group of the black community in the graphic arts" and continuing to "carry on the fight against racism in the cultural area of American society."<sup>95</sup> Already established as an activist group in response to the Metropolitan, the BECC turned to another mainstream institution, the Whitney Museum of American Art, to address the exclusion of Black artists in their exhibitions. This attack on multiple fronts made the BECC highly visible and brought attention to the exclusion of Black artists from mainstream museums and the determination for Black representation in its place.

On April 24, 1969, the coalition met with Whitney director John I. H. Baur and other administrators of the Whitney to discuss its professed commitment to representing artists of all races, prompted by the Whitney exhibition *The 1930's: Painting and Sculpture in America* (October 15–December 1, 1968) just before the opening of *Harlem on My Mind*. The exclusion of Black artists at the Whitney inspired as a response the exhibition at the Studio Museum in Harlem, *Invisible Americans: Black Artists of the 30's*, curated by Henri Ghent, and the BECC followed up with the Whitney about their exclusionary exhibition practices. In an article about the BECC meeting with the Whitney administration, Andrews reported that the Whitney staff agreed to the following five demands given by the BECC:

1. Stage a major exhibition of Black Art Works.
2. Establish a fund to buy more works by black artists.
3. Show at least five annual one-man exhibitions, in the small gallery off the lobby, of black artists.
4. Have more black artists represented in the "Whitney Annual."
5. Consult with black art experts.<sup>96</sup>



Though not satisfied with the progress toward inclusion at the Whitney at the time the article was published, Andrews was quite pleased with the performance of the coalition at the meeting,

The B.E.C.C. set out in the talks with the Whitney Museum to show that we could sit down with “them” and deal in measured tones with the inequities accorded the black man in this society—and dammit we did. . . . We left no promises, and made no requests, but we know we’ll be back to the Whitney Museum of Art someday—as painters and sculptors, we hope; not as stand-in curators and vocal spokesmen for the black man.<sup>97</sup>

Proud of the coalition’s accomplishments at the meeting, Andrews in claiming victory for Black men, ignored the exclusion of Black women from Black representation in the mainstream art museum. The sexism of Andrews’s statement was typical of the Black Arts Movement, which was often split along gender lines.<sup>98</sup> After meeting with staff at the Whitney, the BECC met with representatives from MoMA to discuss the exclusion of Black artists in a memorial exhibition for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and they approached the Met again. For the rest of 1969, the coalition met with the Whitney staff to try to negotiate an agreement to their demands, but the two groups did not reach a compromise. In April 1971, Whitney curator Robert Doty organized the exhibition *Contemporary Black Art in America* (April 6–May 16, 1971), which included 58 Black men and women artists. Ten works from the exhibition were bought during and shortly after the exhibition. Because their demands were not met, however, the BECC led protests against the Whitney during the exhibition.<sup>99</sup>

Owing in part to the efforts of the BECC, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts opened the exhibition *Afro-American Artists: New York and Boston* (May 19–June 23, 1970). Edmund B. Gaither, curator of the exhibition and director of the Elmer Lewis Art School, also attributed the exhibition to the phenomenon of *Harlem on My Mind*.<sup>100</sup> Gaither aligned *Afro-American Artists* with a group of exhibitions focused on Black artists that he called examples of the “new black show.” According to Gaither, the new black show differed from previous exhibitions of work by Black artists because it served as “a valuable educational and cultural experience for both black and white viewers and artists.” New black shows were exhibited in major museums and universities instead of community meeting places such as churches, YWCAs, and schools. New black shows were a result of the pressures from Black arts organizations on mainstream art institutions to exhibit work by Black artists. Gaither stated that because Black artists, curators, and scholars worked together, they were able to produce exhibitions that presented remarkable expressions of Black culture. The emergence of the “new black show” helped establish the significance of what Black artists and curators were trying to do. Through Gaither’s exhibition, he proved the significance of

Black creativity outside the geographic borders of New York. *Afro-American Artists: New York and Boston* responded to *Harlem on My Mind* not only to confirm that the Met had ignored the relevance of the visual arts in their own city, but also to demonstrate that the relevance of Harlem artists was just a part of a larger nation of visual artists on the scene.

Gaither defined the function of the new black show for the 1970s:

It begins to meet the need for real involvement between the black community and the professional art world. It begins to attack the ignorance which still clouds the culture of black people. It provokes people, black and white, to look, and it precipitates benefits for the artists.<sup>101</sup>

What made the “new black show” new was its break from the past struggles and misrepresentation with White mainstream museums. The conceptualization of what Black shows could be was based on the kind of mistakes made with *Harlem on My Mind* and the response to cultural misrepresentation by the BECC, the first organization of its kind. The coalition’s protest, criticism, and determination to infiltrate mainstream art museums contributed powerfully to the Black Arts Movement, making it effective from multiple positions. Instead of positing a specific Black aesthetic, the BECC pushed for the acknowledgement of Black artists, their visibility within White mainstream museums, and the accessibility of artwork by Black artists within Black communities. They contributed along with Black writers, poets, and visual artists of the Black Arts Movement who articulated their connection with Africa and their unique vision in the United States. Black curators and artists forged a space for art by Black artists to be seen. The influence of their actions went beyond the context of the Met and the example of *Harlem on My Mind*, providing a model for institutional critique and activism in the American art world.

In his discussion of the exhibition, Steven C. Dubin ultimately gives credit to the Met for making a great contribution to American museums through *Harlem on My Mind* when he writes,

Even minus the direct experience of the “electronic museum theatre,” it is difficult to deny the importance of the achievement of *Harlem on My Mind*. In the final analysis, for all the exhibition’s flaws or naïve miscalculations, the catalogue’s dedication, “To the people of Harlem—past, present and future—as a record of their achievements,” is a sincere reflection of what’s contained inside.<sup>102</sup>

I agree with Dubin that the exhibition was important. However, in my final analysis, the credit for the significance of *Harlem on My Mind* is due to the community activism toward African American self-representation, visibility,

and recognition in the mainstream art world. Instead of applauding Hoving and Schoener for discriminatory treatment of Black Americans through their exhibit, praise should be given to the artists and protestors in *Spiral*, the BECC, Weusi, and the Harlem Cultural Council for creating an uproar and putting pressure on museum administrations to be more responsible in representing communities of racial and ethnic others. Although there were informative displays about Harlem in the exhibition, the greater record of African American achievement was not found within the catalog or the exhibition; rather, it was struggling outside the doors of the Met. These excluded communities deserve the recognition for speaking out and forming a discourse critiquing the exhibition and their ill treatment by the museum administration.

Lowery Stokes Sims, who worked as a curator of Twentieth-Century Art at the Metropolitan (1972–1999) clarifies the impact of the protest against the exhibition:

As a result of the demonstrations against *Harlem on My Mind*, the MMA (Metropolitan Museum of Art) instituted the Community Programs Department under the directorship of Susan Coppello (later Badden), who hired me in 1972. After she left, Cathy Chance took over and became perhaps the first black administrator in the MMA's history. I eventually had access to the files on *Harlem on My Mind* and could see that the miscommunication about the content of the exhibition existed from the beginning.<sup>103</sup>

In a 1997 interview with Dubin, Thelma Golden, then curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art, stated,

The reason I have my job is because of *Harlem on My Mind*. Lowery Sims often says she got her job at the Met specifically in 1973 because of the controversy. Had the protests not happened, I'm not sure the Whitney or other institutions in this city would have changed. It galvanized most museums to get to the place where in 1990 I could work here and do the things I do. But it took twenty years.<sup>104</sup>

The advancement of African American curators like Golden and Sims are traced back to the protests against *Harlem on My Mind*, not to the exhibition as a self-contained project nor its curators who ignored the artwork by Harlem artists. Although Dubin states that *Harlem on My Mind* “forced museums to represent minority communities,” it was the organized artists’ resistance to the Met’s representations that forced change.<sup>105</sup> Schoener, Hoving, and other museum administrators do not deserve credit for creating the problem that forced Harlem to respond. By privileging the view of the museum, Dubin underplays the con-

tributions of African-American artists and disregards their contributions just as they were ignored in 1968. Without the critical engagement from the African American communities, the exhibition would not have achieved the attention it received.

In the late 1960s a flurry of museums and galleries dedicated to African American culture were founded. In New York alone four institutions dedicated to exhibiting art by Black artists opened: the Studio Museum in Harlem (1967), Cinque Gallery (1969), Acts of Art (1969), and ACA Gallery (1969).<sup>106</sup> On a national map several museums were founded from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s for African American art and cultural history, including the International Afro-American Museum, Detroit (1965), Anacostia Museum of Culture and History, Washington, DC (1967), Museum of the National Center for Afro-American Art, Boston (1968), Museum of African American Art, Los Angeles (1976), Afro-American Historical and Cultural Museum, Philadelphia (1976), California African American Museum of Culture and History, Los Angeles (1979).<sup>107</sup> The response to *Harlem on My Mind* by the Black visual arts community was a fundamental element in a movement toward the autonomy of Black artists.

*Harlem on My Mind* forced the Black visual arts community to organize against unfair representations of Black culture, the exclusion of Black artists from exhibitions, and discrimination in the hiring of Black museum professionals. As historian Deborah Willis explains, the organizers of *Harlem on My Mind* incited many in the Harlem community “to protest that a museum ostensibly dedicated to art suddenly adopted a documentary stance when confronted with the visual presence of the *other* within its walls.”<sup>108</sup> Although gains were made because of the activism that followed *Harlem on My Mind*, the struggle for Black representation in art museums continues against new challenges.

Since *Harlem on My Mind*, over 200 African American museums have been founded around the country. The increase of Blacks as museum professionals and the number of racially specific museums illustrates different strategies for achieving Black visibility in American art. There is an exchange of ideas and artists in both the mainstream art institution and the African American museum, but the African American museum exists specifically to collect, exhibit, and educate visitors about art made by Black artists. The African American museum has come about because the need for cultural expression and understanding could not wait for or depend upon mainstream art institutions to open their gates.<sup>109</sup> The struggle for Black representation in mainstream art institutions reflects the larger national need for cultural recognition, understanding, and respect. The diverse Black visual arts community struggles within itself and mainstream art museums not only to answer the recurring questions “What is Black art?” and “Who are Black artists?” but “How can we insure that Black artists are recognized as equal contributors to the American scene?”

## Notes

I would like to thank Joseph Cumbo, Linda Garber, Richard Mayhew, and Lloyd Yearwood, for their assistance with this article.

1. Thomas Hoving, "Preface," in *Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900–1968*, ed. Allon Schoener (New York: Random House, 1968), unpaginated.

2. The title of the exhibition was taken from the song of the same title written by Irving Berlin in 1933, performed in the musical *As Thousands Cheer* (1933). This Broadway production was the first to feature an African-American woman; Ethel Waters was given star billing in the production. Waters sang "Harlem on My Mind," which told the story of a woman who left Harlem for stardom but missed her home. Borrowing this musical reference as the title of the exhibition invokes the importance of Harlem as a home to Black Americans and suggests the separate worlds of Black and White America.

3. Deborah Willis-Braithwaite points out that the root of the problem and the subsequent protests developed because the Metropolitan, "a museum ostensibly dedicated to art suddenly adopted a documentary stance when confronted with the visual presence of the 'other' within its walls." Deborah Willis-Braithwaite, "They Knew Their Names," in *VanDerZee: Photographer, 1886–1983* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, in association with the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 1993), 8.

4. Steven C. Dubin, "Crossing 125th Street: *Harlem on My Mind* Revisited," in *Displays of Power: Memory and Amnesia in the American Museum* (New York: NYU Press, 1999).

5. The inclusion of African Americans in major museum exhibitions was not a new or innovative concept. Other major art institutions had successfully organized several exhibitions of artworks by African-American artists before *Harlem on My Mind*. For example in 1937 the Museum of Modern Art organized a solo exhibition of artwork by William Edmondson, the institution's first solo exhibition of an African-American artist. The Phillips Memorial Gallery and the Catholic Interracial Council exhibited *Three Negro Artists: Horace Pippin, Jacob Lawrence, Richmond Barthé* in 1946; in 1960 Lawrence had a traveling solo retrospective organized by the Brooklyn Museum; and in 1968 The Minneapolis Institute of Art held an exhibition *Thirty Contemporary Black Artists* that traveled to several museums nationwide. However, the difference between these examples and *Harlem on My Mind* was that the Met was an art museum representing African Americans without their artworks.

6. Jane Anna Gordon, *Why They Couldn't Wait: A Critique of the Black-Jewish Conflict over Community Control in Ocean Hill–Brownsville, 1967–1971* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 63.

7. *Ibid.*, 130 n. 46.

8. *Ibid.*, 24.

9. See Harmon Foundation, "Exhibition of the Work of Negro Artists Presented by the Harmon Foundation at the Art Center 1931," Exhibition brochure, February 16–28, 1931 and Tuliza K. Fleming, "Breaking Racial Barriers," in *Breaking Racial Barriers: African Americans in the Harmon Foundation Collection*, Exhibition catalog, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution (San Francisco: Pomegranate Books, n.d.), 8.

10. See William J. Sloan, "The Documentary Film and the Negro," in *The Documentary Tradition*, 2nd ed., ed. Lewis Jacobs (New York: Norton, 1979), 425.

11. In 1970 Tom Wolfe published an essay/exposé on the Radical Chic phenomenon among the upper classes. In his essay, "Radical Chic" he describes a party that composer Leonard Bernstein threw at his apartment for his elite friends and members of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. The event gave Bernstein and his wealthy cohort the opportunity to temporarily identify with the Panthers through meeting with the racial, economic, and political other and writing them checks in support of their activities. See Tom Wolfe, *Radical Chic and Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1970).

12. See, "The Panthers and the Law," *Newsweek*, February 23, 1970, 30.

13. Jozefa Stuart, "How Hip Should a Museum Get?" *Life Magazine*, February 21, 1969, 14.

14. Hoving, "Preface," *Harlem on My Mind* (1968), unpaginated.

15. Cathy Aldridge, "Exhibit on Everybody's Mind," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 1, 1969, 38. In his 1994 "Introduction to the New Edition," Schoener states that the exhibition filled fifteen galleries covering 18,000 square feet of the museum's second floor. See Schoener, *Harlem on My Mind* (1995), unpaginated.

16. "Sunday Morning with Mandrake: Harlem on the New York Mind," *The Sunday Telegraph*, January 12, 1969 [Metropolitan Museum of Art Library, *Harlem on My Mind* clipping book. Page number omitted]. Schoener states that there were 700 photographs and 500 projected images. See Schoener, *Harlem on My Mind* (1995), unpaginated.

17. Schoener, *Harlem on My Mind* (1995), unpaginated.

18. *Ibid.*

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19. Although the 1995 edition of the catalog includes three dark photographs from Allon Schoener's collection of the 1900–1919, 1920–1929, and 1960–1968 sections it is not enough to get a sense of what it was like to visit the exhibition.

20. John Canaday, "Getting Harlem Off My Mind," *New York Times*, January 12, 1969, D25.

21. Cathy Aldridge, "Harlem On My Mind: A Boxed-In Feeling," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 1, 1969, 38.

22. Canaday, "Getting Harlem Off My Mind," D25.

23. Grace Glueck, "Art: 'Harlem on My Mind' in Slides, Tapes and Photos," *New York Times*, January 17, 1969, 28.

24. Cathy Aldridge, "Exhibit on Everybody's Mind," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 1, 1969, 38.

25. Allon Schoener, "Preface," in *Portal to America: The Lower East Side, 1870–1925*, ed. Allon Schoener (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967), 9.

26. The *Harlem on My Mind* catalog also has a second designer, Ernie Smith.

27. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Harlem's Rich, Varied Sixty-Year History as Cultural Capital of Black America to be Presented in Major Exhibition by Harlem Community at Metropolitan Museum," Press Release, Thursday AM, November 16, 1967, 3; Cathy Aldridge, "Year-Long Show of Harlem History," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 18, 1967, 1; Sandy Shenker, "Museum Aided By AR in Unique Multi-Media Show," *Audio Times*, February 15, 1969, 4; Grace Glueck, "Art: *Harlem on My Mind* in Slides, Tapes and Photos."

28. Grace Glueck, "Art: *Harlem on My Mind* in Slides, Tapes and Photos."

29. Allon Schoener, *The Lower East Side: Portal to American Life, 1870–1924* (New York: Jewish Museum, 1966).

30. Letter from Romare H. Bearden to Mr. Hoving, July 9, 1968, John Henrik Clarke Papers: Box 42–*Harlem on My Mind* Folders.

31. The letter continues with addresses and phone numbers of Jacob Lawrence, Charles Alston, Ernest Crichlow, James Stead, Frank Dandridge, Mel Patrick, Norman Lewis, and Hale Woodruff for Schoener to contact for input about the inclusion of artworks. Letter from Romare Bearden to Allon [Schoener], June 6, 1968. In September, Bearden wrote Hoving, expressing concerns about the museum's plan for a separate art exhibit "to be installed at some distance from the Special Galleries where the photographic material, and the memorabilia, are to be shown, we are anxious to learn how the different sections are to be coordinated." Romare Bearden to Thomas Hoving, September 27, 1968, John Henrik Clarke Papers: Box 42–*Harlem on My Mind* Folders. There were no color transparencies of artwork included in the final exhibition although this was one of Schoener's ideas during the exhibition planning stages in 1968.

32. Romare Bearden, Sam Gilliam Jr., Richard Hunt, Jacob Lawrence, Tom Lloyd, William Williams, and Hale Woodruff, "The Black Artist in America: A Symposium," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, January 1969, 246.

33. Schoener, *Harlem on My Mind* (1995), unpaginated.

34. McGhee was from Milwaukee, Harper was from Chicago, and Nelson was "a respected member of the Manhattan black community." Allon Schoener, "Introduction to the New Edition," in *Harlem on My Mind* (1995), unpaginated.

35. *Art of the American Negro*, organized by artist Romare Bearden, was mounted at Kenwood Reter's Furniture store on 125th Street in Harlem. Sharon F. Patton, *African-American Art* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 210.

36. The other members of the Community Advisory Committee were: Mrs. Katherine Aldridge, William DeFosset, Andrew T. Hatcher, Mrs. Daisy Hicks, Dr. John L. S. Holloman, Robert Hooks, Charles Inniss, Hulan Jack, Arnold Johnson, Mrs. Thelma G. Johnson, Carl Lawrence, Miss Dorothy Maynor, Mrs. Genevieve McClane, The Honorable Constance Baker Motley, Miss Joan Murray, Larry Neal, Gil Noble, George Norford, Mrs. Dorothy Orr, L. Joseph Overton, The Honorable Basil A. Paterson, C. Melvin Patrick, The Honorable Adam Clayton Powell Jr., The Honorable Charles B. Rangel, Layhmond Robinson, James Sneed, The Honorable Percy Sutton, Edward Taylor, Dr. Wyatt T. Walker, The Honorable James L. Watson, Reverend M. Moran Weston, Bruce McM. Wright, Colonel John Silvera, and Robert Jones." John Henrik Clarke Papers: Box 42–*Harlem on My Mind* Folders.

37. Glueck, "Harlem Cultural Council Drops Support for Metropolitan Show," *New York Times*, November 23, 1968, 62.

38. John Henrik Clarke Papers: Box 42–*Harlem on My Mind* Folders.

39. Glueck, "Harlem Cultural Council Drops Support for Metropolitan Show."

40. *Ibid.*

41. Schoener (1995), unpaginated.

42. Martin Arnold, "Museum Edited Essay by Girl, 17," *New York Times*, February 1, 1969, 29; Thomas Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance: Inside the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 176. This omission of the footnotes and quotations brought accusations that Van Ellison plagiarized parts of her catalog essay from Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan,



*Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1963), a source for her term paper.

43. Birt, "A Life in Photography," in Willis-Braithwaite, *VanDerZee*, 59.

44. Van Ellison, "Introduction," in Schoener (1968), 13-14. It was later determined that some of Van Ellison's inflammatory quotes were paraphrased from the Glazer and Moynihan book which was not considered a racist text. Van Ellison's original term paper referenced the book in footnotes that Schoener asked her to remove. Van Ellison, "Introduction" in Schoener (1968), 14; Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance*, 176; Birt, "A Life in Photography," 60; Schoener, *Harlem on My Mind* (1995), unpaginated.

45. Schoener, *Harlem on My Mind* (1995), unpaginated.

46. Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance*, 172.

47. "Mayor, Hoving Feud Over 'Racism' at Met Show," *New York News*, January 17, 1969,

3.

48. Interview between Birt and Schoener, Birt, "A Life in Photography," 62.

49. Murray Schumach, "Harlem Exhibition Opens to Crowds," *New York Times*, January 19, 1969, 61.

50. Twenty-six thousand copies of the catalog were stored in the basement of the Metropolitan for several years. Eventually they were donated to various Black organizations. Schoener, *Harlem on My Mind* (1995), 10.

51. "Museum Withdraws Controversial Catalog," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 8, 1969, 4. The event took place February 10, 1969.

52. Two later versions of the catalog were published in 1979 and 1995. The 1979 version extended the years explored to 1978. In this version, Hoving's "Preface," Van Ellison's "Introduction," and Schoener's "Editor's Foreword" were omitted. Schoener provided a different foreword along with a foreword by Black scholar Nathan Irvin Huggins. In the 1995 version, the original texts from the 1968 catalog appeared along with a new "Foreword" by Black scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr. and a new introduction by Schoener.

53. See "Letters to the Editor of The Times," *New York Times*, January 22, 1969, 46; January 29, 1969, 40; and February 1, 1969, 28, for documentation of this conflict.

54. In anticipation of the opening of *Harlem on My Mind*, the Met held a symposium in which Harlem artists discussed the problems of the Black artist in America. Throughout the event, the importance of museum recognition of Black artists is discussed in relationship to the *Harlem on My Mind* and within a larger national context. The museum bulletin published the transcription of the symposium: Romare Bearden (moderator), Sam Gilliam Jr., Richard Hunt, Jacob Lawrence, Tom Lloyd, William Williams, and Hale Woodruff, "The Black Artist in America: A Symposium," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, January 1969, 245-260.

55. Allon Schoener, "Editor's Foreword," in *Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America 1900-1968*, ed. Allon Schoener (New York: Dell, 1979), 11.

56. Quoted in Schoener, *Harlem on My Mind* (1995), unpaginated.

57. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 224.

58. Other original members of Spiral were Hale Woodruff, Charles Alston, and Merton Simpson. Later members were Emma Amos (the only woman), Reginald Gammon, and Richard Mayhew. See, Ruth Fine, *The Art of Romare Bearden*, with contributions by Mary Lee Corlett, et. al. (Washington: National Gallery of Art in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2003), 28.

59. Schoener, *Harlem on My Mind* (1995), unpaginated.

60. *Ibid.*

61. Letter from Romare Bearden to Allon Schoener, June 6, 1968. John Henrik Clarke Papers: Box 42-Harlem on My Mind Folders.

62. In the words of Benny Andrews, the BECC was organized "for the purpose of making sure there would be no more *Harlem on My Mind* exhibitions foisted on the public, both black and white." Benny Andrews, "The B.E.C.C. Black Emergency Cultural Coalition," *Arts Magazine*, Summer 1970, 18-19; Patton, *African-American Art*, 211.

63. Andrews quoted in Richard J. Gruber, *American Icons: From Madison to Manhattan, the Art of Benny Andrews, 1948-1997* (Augusta, GA: Morris Museum of Art, 1997), 141.

64. The initial group of protestors included Bob Carter, Bill Durante, Mahler Ryder, Reginald Gammon, Norman Lewis, Raymond Saunders, Henri Ghent, Vivian Browne, Calvin Douglass, Cliff Joseph, Joan Sandler, Russ Thompson, Ed Taylor, Felrath Hines, Mel Roman, Roy DeCarava, Raymond Andrews, Barbara Carter, Romare Bearden, Benny, Mary Ellen, Christopher, Julia, and Thomas Andrews, John Dobbs, Alice Neel, Tecla, Zeb, and Francesca. See Andrews, "The B.E.C.C. Black Emergency Cultural Coalition," 19 and Gruber, *American Icons*, 142.

65. "Museum Pickets Assail Hoving over Coming Harlem Exhibition," *New York Times*, January 15, 1969, 41; Jozefa Stuart, "How Hip Should a Museum Get?"

66. "Harlem on Whose Mind" leaflet, Benny Andrews archives, Litchfield, CT, quoted in Gruber, *American Icons*, 142, n. 190.

67. At the time of *Harlem on My Mind*, the only Black employees of the Metropolitan were janitors. Schoener, *Harlem on My Mind* (1995), 1. The Metropolitan hired its first Black curator, Lowery Stokes Sims, in 1986.
68. Gruber, *American Icons*, 142.
69. Schumach, *Harlem Exhibition Opens*, 61.
70. Schoener, *Harlem on My Mind* (1995), unpaginated.
71. Author's interview with Richard Mayhew, February 9, 2006, Soquel, California.
72. This is the visitor count according to Metropolitan Museum vice-director Joseph Noble. See, Schumach, *Harlem Exhibition Opens*, 61.
73. Schoener, *Harlem on My Mind* (1995), unpaginated. Note that the Met dedicated the exhibition to King. "Agenda," Harlem Exhibition Research Committee Meeting, May 1, 1968. John Henrik Clarke Papers: Box 42—*Harlem on My Mind* Folders.
74. Eugene D. Genovese, "An Historian Looks at Hoving's Harlem: Harlem on His Back," *Artforum* 7 (February 1969): 35.
75. Two examples of debates over representations of Malcolm X in more recent history are the film *Malcolm X* (1992) by Spike Lee, and the Malcolm X stamp issued by the U.S. Postal Service as part of their Black Heritage series in 1999. Lee's feature-length film showed different stages of Malcolm's life from his childhood to his death. The film revived Malcolm X's popularity and piqued interest in Malcolm X for a new generation of viewers. Lee's heavily critiqued film represented Malcolm X as a complex man who was more than the popular image of an advocate of violence. The stamp caused nationwide discussions about whether or not Malcolm X was a suitable figure for a stamp, from which period of Malcolm's life should the photograph be taken, and what was Malcolm's relationship to the photographer.
76. Yearwood remembers that the Black photographer most represented in the exhibition was his friend James VanDerZee. Yearwood states, "After VanDerZee, I had the most photographs in the exhibition." Yearwood's photographs do not appear in the exhibition catalog because it went to press before his work was selected by the exhibition organizers. Author's interview with Yearwood, December 15, 2005, Harlem, New York.
77. Author's interview with Yearwood. The advertisement was placed in the *World Telegram and Sun*.
78. Author's interview with Yearwood.
79. Author's interviews with Yearwood and Mayhew.
80. Interview with VanDerZee conducted by Reginald McGhee and Candice Van Ellison in *The World of James VanDerZee: A Visual Record of Black Americans*, compiled and with an introduction by Reginald McGhee (New York: Grove Press, 1969).
81. McGhee co-founded the institute with Charles Inniss. James Haskins, *James VanDerZee: The Picture-Takin' Man* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1979), 247; Birt, "A Life in Photography," 64. Ironically, although *Harlem on My Mind* marked a "discovery" of VanDerZee's work outside of Harlem, VanDerZee did not receive any great financial benefit from the inclusion of his work in *Harlem on My Mind*. VanDerZee reports that the Met paid him "more than three thousand dollars" for permission to use his photographs. In financial debt and caring for his ailing wife, VanDerZee lost his house/photography studio shortly after the exhibition closed. Birt, 65.
82. Deborah Willis-Thomas, *Picturing Us: African American Identity in Photography* (New York: New Press, 1996). Willis also wrote a monograph about James VanDerZee, *VanDerZee: Photographer, 1886–1983* (Washington, DC, Harry N. Abrams, 1993) and an encyclopedic history of African-American photographers, *Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers, 1840 to the Present* (New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2000) among several publications.
83. David Vestal, Roy DeCarava, Ray Francis, and Margery Mann, "Can Whitey do a Beautiful Black Picture Show?" *Popular Photography*, May 1969, 122. Quoted in Peter Galassi, "Introduction," in *Roy DeCarava: A Retrospective* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1996), 33.
84. Galassi, *Roy DeCarava*, 19.
85. See Christopher Phillips, "The Judgment Seat of Photography," in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989) for a discussion of *The Family of Man* in relationship to a post–World War II unification project and the role of photography as a medium used to promote a globally humanitarian image. See also, John Szarkowski, "The Family of Man," *Studies in Modern Art* 4 (New York: Harry Abrams, 1994), 12–37; Bernard Dufour, "The Family of Man," *Art Press* 233, March 1998, 49–53; and Eric J. Sandeen, *Picturing an Exhibition: The Family of Man and the 1950s* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995) for critical analyses of Steichen's exhibition.
86. Hoving, *Harlem on My Mind* (1968), unpaginated.
87. *Ibid.*
88. Hoving, *Harlem on My Mind* (1993), 168.
89. This pretentious play with distance and proximity between Hoving's elite environment "down the avenue" and the Harlem world is in keeping with the reinforcement of racial and class stratification through Radical Chic as expressed by Wolfe.

90. Weusi (Swahili for Black) was a group of artists interested in abstraction based on African forms and rhythms. Formed in 1967, Weusi consisted of young emerging artists concerned with Black nationalist ideology. Abdullah Aziz, Falcon Beazer, Kay Brown, Gaylord Hassan, Bill Howell, Rudy Irwin (Saba Kachenga), Otto Neals, Ademola Olugebefola, Okoe Pyatt, James Phillips, James Sepyo, Taiwo Shabazz, and Nii Ahene Mettle Nunoo from Ghana. Kay Brown, "The Weusi Artists," *Weusi: The Movement A Renaissance Retrospective* (New York: Jamaica Arts Center, 1995), 8. Author's interview with Richard Mayhew.

91. Author's interview with Richard Mayhew.

92. Aldridge, "'Harlem on My Mind': A Boxed in Feeling," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 1, 1969, 38.

93. See Romare Bearden to Thomas Hoving, June 6, July 9, and September 27, 1968. John Henrik Clarke Papers: Box 42—*Harlem on My Mind* Folders.

94. Andrews, "The B.E.C.C.," 19.

95. *Ibid.*

96. A later account of the meeting between the BECC and the Whitney explained that the coalition made the following four demands to the Whitney, which the museum rejected: 1. the Museum should put on an exhibition of Black artists with a Black guest curator; 2. put more Black artists in the Whitney's Annual; 3. hire a Black curatorial staff to coordinate these endeavors and other activities in the future; 4. stage five or more solo exhibitions of Black artists during the year. Andrews, "The B.E.C.C.," 19–20 and Gruber, *American Icons*, 144.

97. Andrews, "The B.E.C.C.," 19.

98. Artist Faith Ringgold took on the battle against racism and sexism beginning in the late 1960s. In 1971, Ringgold co-founded Where We At, an artist group for women, as an alternative to the male dominated artist group Spiral led by Romare Bearden. Patton, *African-American Art*, 197.

99. One artist who was involved in the coalition's protest against the Whitney, Raymond Saunders, was included in the exhibition. Fifteen other artists withdrew from the Whitney exhibition choosing instead to be in the exhibition, "Rebuttal to the Whitney," at the Black-owned Acts of Art Gallery. Patton, *African-American Art*, 212.

100. Edmund B. Gaither, "Introduction," in *Afro-American Artists: New York and Boston* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1970).

101. *Ibid.*

102. Steven C. Dubin, "Crossing 125th Street: *Harlem on My Mind* Revisited," 49.

103. Dr. Lowery Stokes Sims is currently president of The Studio Museum in Harlem and has received several honorary doctorates for her groundbreaking work at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. See, Lowery Stokes Sims, "Discrete Encounters: A Personal Recollection of The Black Art Scene of the 1970s," in Kellie Jones, *Energy/Experimentation: Black Artists and Abstraction, 1964–1980* (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2006), 50.

104. As quoted in Dubin, *Displays of Power*, 54. Golden is currently Chief Curator at The Studio Museum in Harlem.

105. *Ibid.*

106. The Studio Museum and Cinque were co-founded by artist and activist Romare Bearden who was integral to the protest of *Harlem on My Mind*.

107. I am grateful for the work of Sharon F. Patton through her book *African-American Art* and its helpful timeline for much of this information.

108. Deborah Willis-Braithwaite, *VanDerZee*, 8.

109. In the case of the Met, nine exhibitions have featured African-American artists in group and solo shows beginning in 1976. Three of the nine were traveling shows organized by the Met but not on view at the museum: *Black Artists from The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, April 14–June 4, 1976 (traveling). This exhibition was the first show of Black art at the museum and was organized by Sims. She recalls of the experience, "That project resulted in my first lesson in institutional politics." Sims, 48; *Selected Works by Black Artists from the Collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, February 7–March 30, 1979 (traveling); *Faces and Figures: Selected Works by Black Artists, The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, February 16–April 1, 1988 (traveling); *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, October 19, 1992–April 22, 1993; *I Tell My Heart, The Art of Horace Pippin*, February 1–April 30, 1995; *Barbara Chase-Riboud: The Monument Drawings*, June 22–September 5, 1999; *African-American Artists, 1929–1945: Prints, Drawings, and Paintings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, January 15–July 6, 2003; *Modern Storytellers: Bearden, Birch, Lovell, Ringgold*, May 6–December 1, 2003; *Romare Bearden at the Met*, October 19, 2004–March 6, 2005. Thanks to Lisa M. Messinger, Assistant Curator, Department of Nineteenth-Century, Modern, and Contemporary Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art for help constructing this list.

